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ABSTRACT

To assess the potential for linking American teacher centers in a national information and resource sharing network, leaders of 44 teacher centers and teacher-education programs identified with the open-education movement were interviewed. Interviewees were asked if they would value an agency to increase their information and talent sharing, and to identify possibilities and problems of such an attempt. The interviews disclosed widespread interest in expanding professional communication and mutual problem solving. Four specific functions that might be undertaken by a formal networking and assistance agency are identified; limitations of such an agency are discussed. An attachment lists those persons interviewed and site visits made. (SK)

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Common Purposes as a Prerequisite for Networking

by

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AERA, April 2, 1975

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During the past nine months a colleague and I have conducted a study of American teachers' centers in order to assess the potential for linking them in a national information and resource sharing network. The work is being done under a 14-month contract from the National Institute of Education Program on School Capacity for Problem Solving. To varying degrees, foundations which have financed teachers' centers (Rockefeller, Ford, Carnegie, New World) have contributed ideas to the study.

Our first task was to interview leaders of 44 teachers' centers and teacher education programs loosely identified with the open education and active-learning curriculum reform movement. Would they value an agency that would try to lengthen, strengthen, and multiply their existing lines of information and talent sharing? What are the possibilities (and the problems) in a formal attempt to extend their ideas and expertise to a wider educational community? Our second task was to designate linking and technical assistance functions that a resource sharing agency might undertake, and how they might be carried out.

The following remarks report on findings from personal interviews of teachers' center leaders, conducted between May and October 1974. Attachment A is a list of these interviews, citing names of programs, persons interviewed, date and location of interview, and interviewer. At the end of this list is another list of interviewees who were formerly involved in centers or who are interested in centers as an alternative to conventional teacher preparation and inservice education. Since October we have continued to be in communication with many of the respondents, and have made new contact with many more centers, revising and advancing our understanding as we go. Thus I emphasize that the paper in hand is based only on the interviews conducted and coded between May and October of last year.

By intention, the study began with a group of centers which grew out of projects in open education and the active-learning curriculum movement, influenced by the British experience in informal education and teachers' centers. The survey followed this group's leads to a widening network of centers. From information about the content of their existing informal

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communications and assistance-giving and from direct questioning, we wanted to assess their interest in a wider information and resource exchange and their capacity to give help to newcomers in the field. We sought to define the feasibility, substance, process, and dimensions of a more formal networking arrangement that would encompass technical assistance.

Our definition of a teachers' center both preceded and grew out of our interviews. In selecting sites to interview we assumed some commonality of characteristics, but we could not articulate these very specifically. Analysis of our interviews clarified these characteristics. The evolution of the definition we came up with can be illustrated by our experimentation with several usages--"teacher center," "teachers center," "teachers' center" --and our eventual adoption of the latter. The apostrophe, connoting the possessive, seems to us most apt for the group of organizations we surveyed. Each is a program providing continuing education for practicing teachers (mostly elementary teachers) which aims to be responsive to *teachers' own* definitions of their continuing learning needs rather than to school administrators', college professors' or curriculum committees' imposed agendas. Such a program may be a *place* where teachers come to work together and receive instruction, or share self instruction, or it may be a *staff* of advisors who go out to help teachers in their schools, working in the same spirit of teachers' definition of their own learning programs.

The organizations which contributed to our study are *similar* in the following ways: 1) They offer teachers fresh curriculum materials and/or lesson ideas, emphasizing active, exploratory, frequently individualized classroom work, not textbook and workbook study. 2) These programs engage teachers in making their own curriculum materials, building classroom apparatus, or involve them in some entirely new learning pursuit of their own so as to reacquaint them with the experience of being active, exploratory learners themselves. 3) Teachers' center instructors are themselves classroom teachers, sharing their own practical, classroom-developed materials; or they are advisors--formerly classroom teachers--who view their job as stimulating, supporting, and extending a teacher in her own directions of growth, not implementing a new instructional model or strategy. 4) Attendance at teachers' center classes is voluntary, not prescribed by the school district; or if indirectly required (for instance, as a way to spend release time or to earn advancement credits), programs offered are based on teachers' expressions of their own training needs, and several choices are offered.

The teachers' center programs included in the survey are *dissimilar* in origin, leadership style, sponsorship, financing, theoretical grounding, programming, subject matter emphasis, organization, and setting. Nevertheless, the interviews document not only information-sharing and visiting among them with generous assistance by experienced people to beginners, but also conferencing and joint research stimulated by foundation grants. There are subgroups within this group of centers, to the extent that some observers have worried that divisiveness between leaders or preciousness within subgroups might impede broader resource exchanges. Yet, with a few exceptions, one does not find in these interviews expressions of exclusivity, of not being able to learn from others who work differently. These

center people seem eager to learn with each other, even though they are aware of their differences in style and setting; over the years many of them have travelled frequently over long distances and at their own expense to meet with each other. (People associated with thirteen of the centers are members of the North Dakota Study Group--so called because it was first convened and still is coordinated by Vito Perrone, dean of the Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota.)

The interviews also show that there is widespread interest in expanding such professional communication and mutual problem solving. The respondents suggested several functions that a formal networking and assistance-giving agency could perform. These functions are 1) compiling a directory of teachers' centers, advisories, and similar programs, and offering referral and matchmaker services within this constituency and with interested outsiders; 2) collecting and circulating curriculum for children and for teachers' inservice, monographs, theses, reports, films, etc., which substantiate a developmental approach to children's learning and to teachers' preparation and improvement; 3) arranging for personnel exchanges among centers as well as internships in established centers by apprentice advisors, workshop instructors and people aiming to start new centers; 4) facilitating study groups for problem solving and research among people in experienced centers and related educators.

All interviews in the survey show at least minimum interest in the above functions. Such interest was expressed at two levels: a) Wanting to find out or to let others know about teachers' center activity; planning to go to visit one or more centers elsewhere, or being in the position of hosting visitors fairly frequently; and thus seeing need for a service that would guide inquiries to those centers that would be most instructive to them. (Respondents at 18 sites had interests limited to function 1.) b) Seeing value in working occasionally in some depth (more than just attending a conference) with people from other centers on mutual interests and problems. (Respondents at 26 sites expressed this level of interest, involving exchanges suggested by functions 2, 3, and 4. Several are already involved in such exchanges.)

Although we started with interviews in a group of centers loosely identified with open education and it seemed, already comprising an informal network, it was not our intention to limit the scope of our study to open educators, but rather to see how far out information and resource sharing could spread and still be meaningful. What about programs calling themselves teacher centers which train teachers according to objectives-based instructional management systems and teacher competency schedules? Could a network embrace those "teaching centers" which are essentially not places but organizational systems for collaboration among a state education agency, college of education, and public school districts, to accomplish both preservice and inservice education?

Our survey included several interviews at centers whose leaders avoid identifying themselves with any particular instructional approach and whose purposes are expressed simply as introducing teachers to curriculum alternatives and supporting them in change. We searched for a commonality within

all the interviews that would be broad enough to link inservice programs with disparate purposes, contexts, programs, and styles.

But not too broad: we learned from our interviews that people in teachers' centers consider their own *local* purposes, programs, and problems to be the source of most of the expertise they have to share as well as most of the motivation they feel to learn. Thus most respondents believed that a network which abstracts and generalizes widely loses fluency, cogency, and immediacy in communication. The majority of interviewees said they would value wider contacts than they now had--to pool ideas, expand the dialogue about the philosophical and professional issues which have given rise to teachers' centers, and problem-solve about financing and "institutionalizing" centers. But they felt that such communications would be productive only if participants shared basic premises and purposes.

A criterion for defining the constituency of a teachers' centers network was suggested by a number of respondents who talked with us about its requirement to be clearly focussed without being exclusive or precious. This criterion was the center staff's premise about teachers' learning. A generalized statement of this premise is that teachers must be more than technicians, must continue to be learners; and that long-lasting improvements in education will come through inservice programs that identify individual starting points for learning in each teacher; build on teachers' motivation to take more, not less, responsibility for curriculum and instruction decisions in the school and the classroom; and welcome them to participate in the design of professional development programs.

ATTACHMENT A

Teachers' Centers and Advisories Surveyed

ZONE 1

Connecticut

Center for Open Education - University of Connecticut/Hartford - Vincent Rogers: 8/13/74 - Storrs, Conn. - KD

The Teacher Center - New Haven, Conn. - Corinne Levin, Fred Acquavita, and Edith Kahn: 8/1/74 - on site - BA

The Teachers' Center at Greenwich - Greenwich, Conn. - Celia Houghton: 5/16/74 - on site - KD

Massachusetts

Advisory for Open Education - Cambridge, Mass. - Allan Leitman: 8/12/74 - on site - KD; and Elsom Eldridge: 5/22/74 - on site - KD

Boston Children's Museum Resource Center - Boston, Mass. - Jim Zion: 8/12/74 - on site - KD

EDC Follow Through Project - Newton, Mass. - Carol Weiss, Jeanne McDonald, and Posie Churchill: 5/21/74 - on site - KD

EDC Open Education Advisory - Newton, Mass. - Louise Hauser: 5/22/74 - on site - KD

Greater Boston Teachers Center - Cambridge, Mass. - Ed Yeomans: 5/21/74 - on site - KD; and John Arnold: 7/16/74 - Cleveland - KD

Institute for Learning and Teaching - University of Massachusetts/Boston - Jim Case: 8/12/74 - Boston - KD

Integrated Day Program - University of Massachusetts/Amherst - Masha Rudman: 8/1/74 phone - BA; and Mason Bunker: 9/5/74 - phone - BA

The Workshop for Learning Things - Watertown, Mass. - George Cope: 5/22/74 - on site - KD

New Jersey

The Center for Open Education - Tenafly, N.J. - Valery Jameson: 7/29/74 - phone - BA; and Miriam Maracek and Valery Jameson: 8/14/74 - on site - BA

Educational Testing Service - Princeton, N.J. - Edward Chittenden: 8/6/74 - Prospect School - KD; and Anne Bussis: 8/6/74 - Prospect School, and phone: 9/5/74 - KD

New York

Bank Street College of Education - New York, N.Y. - Gordon Klopf: 8/14/74 - on site - BA; and Richard Feldman and Elizabeth Gilkeson: 8/27/74 and 9/3/74 - on site - BA

The Center for Learning - Great Neck, N.Y. - Pearl Siegel and Pat Needly: 9/11/74 - on site - BA

Child Development Resource Center - Great Neck, N.Y. - Betty Knight: 8/22/74 - on site - BA; and 9/3/74 - phone - BA

Community Resources Institute - New York, N.Y. - Herb Mack: 4/12/74 - phone - KD; and 5/21/74 - on site - LT; and 9/26/74 - phone - KD

Creative Teaching Workshop - New York, N.Y. - Floyd Page: 8/9/74 - on site - KD; and 5/21/74 - on site - LT; and 8/1/74 - phone - KD

West Genesee/Syracuse University Teaching Center - Camillus, N.Y. - Christine San Jose: 9/18/74 - phone - KD; and Dave Weldon, Jim Finn, Gary Vander Hart, and Joan Scully: 7/17/74 - Chautauqua - KD

Workshop Center for Open Education - New York, N.Y. - Lillian Weber: 8/5/74 and 8/6/74 - Prospect School - KD; and 5/16/74 - Greenwich - KD; and 5/17/74 and 5/20/74 - on site - KD; and Georgia Delano - paper received 1974 - KD

Vermont

The Prospect School - North Bennington, Vt. - Jane Carter and Corinne Hyman: 8/6/74 - on site - KD; and Pat Carini: 6/24/74 - Washington, D.C. - KD

ZONE 2

North Carolina

North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction - Raleigh, N.C. - James W. Jenkins - 8/74 - on site - DK

Ohio

Greater Cleveland Teacher Center for Informal Education - University Heights, Ohio - Penny Buchanan: 7/16/74 - on site - KD

Pennsylvania

The Free Learning Environment Program (FRELEA) - Pittsburgh, Pa. - June Delano: 9/74 - phone - BA

Philadelphia Advisory Center at Keyser School (EDC) - Philadelphia, Pa. - Marie Tervalon: 8/5/74 - Prospect School - KD; and Ernestine Rouse: 9/19/74 - phone - KD

The Philadelphia Teacher Center at Durham School - Philadelphia, Pa. - Don Rasmussen, Allan Banbury, and Fred Locke: 5/18/74 - on site - KD

Washington, D.C.

The Advisory and Learning Exchange - Washington, D.C. - Olive Covington and Charito Kruvant: 6/25/74 - on site - KD; and Mary Lela Sherburne: 9/18/74 - phone - KD

ZONE 3

Colorado

Mountain View Center for Environmental Education - Boulder, Colo. - David Hawkins: 8/8/74 - New Haven, Colo. - KD; and 5/20/74 - phone - KD

Illinois

Nettelhorst School Advisory - Chicago, Ill. - Dan Scheinfeld, Ron Cichon, and Clive Hazell: 6/28/74 - on site - KD

Teacher Curriculum Work Center - Chicago, Ill. - Joan Bradbury and Sandy Lang: 6/29/74 - on site - KD; and Joan Bradbury: 6/28/74 - at Nettelhorst - KD

Teachers' Center Project - Southern Illinois University/Edwardsville - Tom O'Brien: 8/14/74 - on site - KD; and 7/2/74 - correspondence - KD

Michigan

Kalamazoo Valley Intermediate School, Inservice Education Department - Kalamazoo, Mich. - Ronald Sergeant: 9/16/74 - phone - LT

Minnesota

Minneapolis/University of Minnesota Teachers Center - Minneapolis, Minn. - Fred Hayen: 6/22/74 - Minneapolis, Minn. - KD; and Margaret Shreyer and Ken Howey: 7/17/74 and 7/18/74 - Chautauqua - KD

Missouri

The Educational Confederation - St. Louis, Mo. - Robert Mai: 8/15/74 - on site - KD

The Learning Center - St. Louis, Mo. - Emily Richard: 8/15/74 - on site - KD; and 5/74 - phone - KD

The Learning Exchange - Kansas City, Mo. - Gail Johnston: 8/16/74 - on site - KD

North Dakota

North Dakota Center for Teaching and Learning - University of North Dakota/Grand Forks - Vito Perrone, Clara Pederson, Mike Patton, John Wood, Ursula Simonson, Dick Landry, and Nancy Miller: 6/20/74 and 6/21/74 - on site - KD

ZONE 4

California

Creative Teaching Center - Mountain View, Ca. - Ann Roper: 9/26/74 - on site - LT

Creative Teaching Center - Sherman Oaks, Ca. - Pat King: 9/19/74 - on site - LT

International Center for Educational Development - Encino, Ca. - Virgil Howes: 9/19/74 - on site - LT

Open Space - Culver City, Ca. - Ed Gans: 9/19/74 - on site - LT; and 9/30/74 - phone - LT

Park-South Teacher Center - San Francisco, Ca. - Doug Haner: 9/25/74 - on site - LT

Teacher Center at Oakland START - Oakland, Ca. - Amity Buxton: 8/26/74 - at Teacher Active Learning Center, San Francisco, Ca. - KD

Teacher Learning Center - San Francisco, Ca. - Betty McNamara: 8/23/74 - on site - KD

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS

Bill Baker - Early Childhood Education Coordinator, Alameda County Superintendent of Schools: 4/74 - Berkeley - KD

Lucy Ann Carmichael - McDonough School, New Orleans: 9/24/74 - phone - LT

Dave Darland - NEA, Washington, D.C.: 5/23/74 - on site - KD

David Fielker - Abbey Woods Mathematics Teacher Center, London: 8/14/74 - St. Louis - KD

Mary Harper - Williamsburg County Schools, Kingstree, S.C.: 9/25/74 - phone - LT

George Hein - former director, EDC Follow Through, and partner, Workshop for Learning Things: 7/25/74 - phone - KD

John Favors - director, Bay Area Learning Center, Oakland, Ca.: 6/10/74 - on site - KD

Lilian Katz - Early Childhood Education Clearinghouse, University of Illinois: 6/28/74 - on site - KD

Eugenia Kemble - United Federation of Teachers, New York, N.Y.: 9/11/74 - on site - BA

Mary London - director of now defunct Creative Environment Teaching Center, Los Angeles: 9/17/74 - phone - LT

Robert Luke - NEA, Washington, D.C.: 8/12/74 - San Francisco - LT

Theodore Manolakes and Bernard Spodek - University of Illinois, Urbana, Ill.: 6/27/74 - on site - KD

Ken Mellor and Alan Sinclair - Rhode Island Teacher Center, Providence, R.I.: 7/74 - Chautauqua - KD

Joseph Pascarrelli - Educational Improvement Center of Northwest New Jersey, Cedar Knolls, N.J.: 8/2/74 - on site - BA

Charles Rathbone - former member St. Louis Confederation: 9/16/74 - phone - KD

Judy Richardson - Wingra School, Madison, Wis.: 8/5/74 - Prospect School - KD

Allen A. Schmieder, National Center for Improvement of Educational Systems, Washington, D.C.: 5/23/74 - on site - KD

Emmit Smith - Texas Center for the Improvement of Educational Systems: 7/18/74 - Chautauqua - KD

Russell Wood - deputy director, Teacher Corps, Washington, D.C.: 5/24/74 - on site - KD

Sam Yarger - Syracuse Project for the Study of Teacher Centers: 7/17/74 - Chautauqua - KD

INTERVIEWERS:

Beth Alberty
Kathleen Devaney
Lorraine Thorn
Dennis Kass